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Urbanization and Creating Livable Cities

Chapter Objectives

This chapter will help students:

Describe the scale of urbanization

Assess urban and suburban sprawl

Outline city and regional planning and land use strategies

Evaluate transportation options

Describe the roles of urban parks

Analyze environmental impacts and advantages of urban centers

Assess the pursuit of sustainable cities

Lecture Outline

I. Central Case: Managing Growth in Portland, Oregon

- A. Oregon's law required comprehensive land use plans, including an **urban growth boundary (UGB)**, separating urban and rural areas.
- B. Oregon was taking many pioneering environmental steps, including enacting bottle bills, enhancing state parks, and cleaning up the Willamette River.
- C. The Metropolitan Service District, or Metro, focused growth on existing urban centers and on building communities where people can walk or take mass transit between home, work, and shopping.
- D. Opponents of Ballot Measure 37, requiring that landowners be compensated if the value of their land is decreased by government regulation, challenged the law and a new ballot initiative is scheduled for late 2007.

II. Our Urbanizing World

- A. Industrialization has driven the move to urban centers.

1. The shift from rural to urban living, or **urbanization**, may be the single greatest change our society has undergone since we changed from a nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle to a sedentary agricultural one.
 2. Agriculture gave rise to sedentary societies, allowing the rise of specialized professions, class structure, political hierarchies, and urban centers.
 3. In developed nations, urbanization has slowed because most people already live in cities, towns, and **suburbs**, the smaller communities that ring cities.
 4. Since 1950, urban populations have quadrupled worldwide.
- B. Today's urban centers are unprecedented in scale.
- C. Urban growth has often been rapid.
1. More people are moving from farms to cities than from cities to farms.
 2. The human population overall is growing.
 3. Internationally, most fast-growing cities today are in the developing world, because industrialization is now having the same effects on developing nations it has already had on developed ones.
- D. Various factors influence the geography of urban areas.
1. Climate, topography, and configuration of waterways are powerful forces that help determine if a small village will become a major city.
 2. Portland, OR, developed due to its location on the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia rivers, allowing the city to become a point of trade. Chicago was served by major rail hubs, allowing for the development as a grain trading center as well as an efficient location for slaughterhouses.
- E. People have moved to suburbs.

III. Sprawl

- A. **Sprawl** is a term that has become laden with meanings. It refers to the spread of low-density urban or suburban development outward from an urban center.
- B. Today's urban areas spread outward.
- C. Sprawl has several causes.
1. Human population is growing.
 2. Per capita land consumption has increased.
 3. Government policies encouraged sprawl by providing funding for the Interstate Highway system as well as other road-building projects that moved population away from cities and into suburbs.
- D. What is wrong with sprawl?
1. Transportation—sprawl constrains transportation options.
 2. Pollution—sprawl increases air pollution.
 3. Health—driving cars largely takes the place of walking, so sprawl promotes physical inactivity.
 4. Land use—more land is developed while less is left as forests, fields, farmland, or ranchland.

5. Economics—sprawl drains tax dollars from existing communities and funnels them into infrastructure for new development on the fringes of those communities.
- E. Many people are now fighting sprawl.
1. Ideas and policies have coalesced under the concept of **smart growth**.
 2. Proponents of smart growth want their communities to manage their growth in ways that maintain or improve quality of life for residents.
 3. This means guiding the rate, placement, and style of development to serve the environment, economy, and community.

IV. Creating Livable Cities

- A. City and regional planning are means for creating livable urban areas.
1. Daniel Burnham's 1909 Plan of Chicago set early standards for **city planning**, the professional pursuit that attempts to design cities to maximize their efficiency, functionality, and beauty.
 2. In today's world of sprawling metropolitan areas, **regional planning** has become important.
- B. **Zoning** is a key tool for planning.
1. Zoning is the practice of classifying areas for different types of development and land use.
- C. Urban growth boundaries have become popular.
1. The UGBs aimed to revitalize downtowns; protect farms, forests, and their industries; and assure urban dwellers some access to open space near cities.
- D. The "**new urbanism**" is now in vogue.
1. A school of thought called the new urbanism seeks to design neighborhoods on a walkable scale, with homes, businesses, schools, and other amenities all close together.
 2. New urbanist neighborhoods are generally connected to public transit systems.
 3. Smart growth counters sprawl by managing the rate, placement, and style of development through policy initiatives.
- E. Transportation options are vital to livable cities.
1. A key ingredient for improving the quality of urban life is making multiple transportation options available.
 2. Mass transit options are cheaper, more energy efficient, and cleaner than automobiles, and also ease traffic congestion.
- F. Parks and open space are key elements of livable cities.
- G. City parks were widely established at the turn of the last century.
1. Two sometimes conflicting goals motivated the establishment and design of early city parks.
 - a. They were pleasure grounds for the wealthy, who supported their establishment financially.
 - b. They also alleviated congestion and allowed some escape for the poverty-stricken immigrants.
- H. Smaller public spaces are also important.

1. Large city parks, playgrounds, community gardens, and greenways are all important.

V. Urban Sustainability

- A. Urban resource consumption brings a mix of environmental impacts.
 1. It would seem that urban living involves greater consumption of resources; however, there is a complex mix of consequences.
 - a. Resource sinks—cities and towns must import from widespread sources nearly everything they need to feed, clothe, and house their inhabitants. Cities also export wastes.
 - b. Efficiency—cities should be able to minimize per capita consumption by maximizing the efficiency of resource use and delivery of goods and services.
 - c. More consumption—the ecological footprints of cities are much greater than their actual land areas.
- B. Urban centers preserve land.
- C. Urban centers suffer and export pollution.
- D. Urban centers foster innovation.
- E. Some seek sustainability for cities.
 1. Researchers in the field of **urban ecology** hold that cities can be viewed explicitly as ecosystems.

VI. Conclusion

- A. As half the human population has shifted from rural to urban lifestyles, the nature of our impact on the environment has changed.
- B. Limiting resource waste by making urban areas more sustainable will be vital for the future.
- C. Transportation options must include accessible mass transit.
- D. Adequate park lands and greenspaces must be available.